

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Easter B  
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Luke 24:1-12

### The Vindicated Word

“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” (Luke 24:5–7 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the risen Lord, the only Savior of the world,

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Why seek the living among the dead? It’s a good question. What were the women doing there, early in the morning on the first day of the week? What did they expect to find? Obviously a tomb with a stone door and a corpse inside. They had come with burial spices and oils to finish preparing Jesus for burial. After all, they knew that corpses do not rise from the dead.

What they found, however, was an open, empty tomb and two men with clothes that shined like Jesus at His transfiguration. And while that was certainly unexpected, their news shouldn’t have been: “He is not here, but has risen!” After all, Jesus had said at least three times, “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” But they didn’t believe Him. Why don’t we?

Face it. If someone told you that he was preparing to die and on the third day rise again, would you believe him? Put yourself in the disciples’ sandals. They had left everything to follow Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James, and John left the family business to go off with this itinerant preacher from Nazareth who said to them little more than “Follow Me.” Matthew left a lucrative tax collection business to follow Jesus. Things were going along just fine—miracles, teaching, crowds, popularity—until Jesus starts talking what to fleshly ears can only be called “crazy talk.” “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” It didn’t make sense. It was too hard to hear and even harder to believe.

So when the women returned and told the Eleven what they’d seen, no one believed them. It seemed like nonsense. And when Peter himself saw the empty tomb and the burial cloths, he wondered what had happened. He didn’t believe Jesus had risen because he had forgotten Jesus’ words.

Yet, Jesus had spoken the truth, whether He was believed or not. He had proven to be a true Prophet. What He said would happen did – exactly as He said.

So the word from the tomb is this: “He is not here, but has risen. Remember how He told you.” The Word of Jesus is vindicated. He is proven true. His Word is proven reliable. This is the linchpin of our faith, that He “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

This is so important that Paul discusses it at great length in that magnificent fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians which begins this way:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me” (15:3–8).

As Paul continues, He explains why Jesus’ resurrection is so important. After all, if Christ is not raised, then Paul’s preaching and the preaching you’re hearing here today is empty, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (Macbeth). It’s a lot of hot air and wasted words. If Christ is not raised, then your faith is empty too. Your believing is for nothing; there’s no point, and what’s worse, you’re still in your sins. If Christ is not raised, then all the dead who have gone before us are lost and there is no hope of ever seeing them again.

So, to paraphrase Paul, “If the only reason we have hope in Christ is in this life, that somehow Jesus will help us cope, make us feel good about ourselves, help us be healthy and wealthy, if that’s all there is to Jesus, then we’re the most pitiful fools that have ever bought into a religious lie and are victims of the biggest hoax the world has ever seen.”

That’s how important the resurrection of Jesus is. For if Christ is not raised, then He can’t be trusted, His Word can’t be trusted, His endorsement of the Old Testament and His guarantee of the apostolic word of the New Testament is nothing more than empty talk and wishful thinking.

But the message of the angel rings out from the tomb, across the centuries, to your ears here today. “He is risen!” It’s a message that has sustained countless people through the ages. It’s a message that has cost many people their lives. For, rather than deny it to save themselves, they died for believing and confessing it.

In 2007, a group of fifteen British sailors were held captive in Iran for twelve days for allegedly invading Iranian waters. They signed statements indicating that they indeed were in Iranian waters. They also signed statements apologizing for past British transgressions against Iran. After their release, they renounced everything they had signed. Under pressure, they were willing to lie in order to save their lives. It happens all the time. But it did not happen with those eyewitnesses who saw Jesus alive after His death. They could have spared their lives by changing their story, but they didn’t. They stuck to their story, as unbelievable as it was.

Beloved, you live in a privileged time. You live in the “last days” of the old creation, the time of the fulfillment. The work of saving this fallen cosmos is accomplished. The new creation has dawned. The dead are raised. “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Christ has risen. His Word is vindicated. The apostolic Word is vindicated. The ministry of the Word and the Church gathered around His Word is vindicated. Your faith in Christ is vindicated. You can be as confident of your resurrection as Jesus is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. Our preaching is not in vain. Your faith is not in vain. Your sins are forgiven. There is hope in this life, hope in your death, hope for eternal life with God, hope for a new creation. And it all hangs on this little sentence: He is risen.

We’ve come a long way in our Lenten pilgrimage to arrive at this bright and glorious day. We have heard Christ’s words of life to us from the cross: the pardoning Word of His forgiveness, the promising word of paradise, the faithful word spoken in abandonment, the compassionate word to His mother, the suffering word of His thirst, the dying word committing His spirit to the Father, the remembering word of the Lord’s Supper, the fulfilled word of His mission—“it is finished.” And today, the vindicated and vindicating word of the resurrection.

Rejoice, dear baptized, believing child of God. Rejoice. He is risen! Remember what He told you.

Let us pray: For Your resurrection, for Your appearances to eyewitnesses, for Your Word, Your Baptism, Your body and blood, Your forgiveness, life, and salvation, for the sure hope of eternal life and our resurrection, we give You thanks and praise, most holy Jesus. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(From Words of Life from the Cross, CPH, 2010)

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